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Office

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, February 2002

Report of Provincial Results

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Results at a Glance

Overall Results for English-Language Students Who Wrote the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, February 2002 (publicly funded schools)[1]

	February 2002		October 2000	
	#	%	#	%
Passed Both Reading and Writing	97 227	75%	86 248	68%
Passed Only Reading	6 747	5%	15 154	12%
Passed Only Writing	12 209	9%	6 945	5%
Failed Both Reading and Writing	12 849	10%	18 699	15%
Number of Students Who Wrote Both Parts of the OSSLT	129 032		127 046	

Highlights of Achievement Results

- In February 2002, 75% of students passed both the reading and the writing components of the test.
- A further 5% of students passed the reading component of the test, bringing the total percentage of students who passed reading to 80%.
- A further 9% of students passed the writing component of the test, bringing the total percentage of students who passed writing to 84%.
- More students passed the February 2002 test than passed the October 2000 trial administration.

Key Messages

- The results of the February 2002 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) are very encouraging; the vast majority of students are meeting the provincial standard for the OSSLT.
- Teachers are making reading and writing a high priority, and their efforts appear to be showing good results.
- The OSSLT is a useful quality assurance measure that shows the extent to which Ontario students are meeting a common, basic standard for literacy across the province.

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[1] Percentages may not add up to 100%, due to rounding.

- For those relatively few students who did not pass the reading and/or the writing component, the test is an early warning system that provides the students, their parents and their teachers with some important diagnostic information to help the students improve.

- It is important to emphasize that the OSSLT results should be used to improve teaching and learning; they should not be used to rank schools. Ranking provides no information about why scores are high or low; it invites simplistic and misleading comparisons that ignore the particular circumstances affecting achievement in each school, and it distracts people from addressing the more critical issue of how to improve learning for all students.

Key Recommendations

EQAO recommends

- that **school boards**, in consultation with their school communities, and using the EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning, incorporate the overall and specific data from the February 2002 OSSLT into their existing board and school improvement plans for developing all students' literacy skills. Boards should implement strategies for improving student achievement in reading and writing that extend across the elementary and secondary grades and across all subject areas.

- that **schools,** in consultation with their communities, incorporate the overall and specific data from the February 2002 OSSLT into their existing school literacy improvement plans and develop curriculum-wide strategies for improving student achievement in reading and writing.

- that **teachers** be encouraged to use the resources available on EQAO's Web site to assist students in preparing to write the OSSLT successfully.

- that **parents** enhance their own understanding of the reading and writing skills required for successful completion of the OSSLT and assist students in understanding the relevance and importance of literacy skills to future educational and career opportunities, and in everyday life outside school.

Background

Introduction

The purpose of the EQAO is to promote greater accountability in the publicly funded education system in Ontario and to improve the quality of education in the province. In order to fulfill its mandate, EQAO conducts several province-wide assessments, among them the OSSLT.

The results of these assessments provide individual, school and school board data on student achievement. Parents receive an Individual Student Report that provides information on their child's achievement on the assessment. Schools and boards create their own reports, based on EQAO data, for distribution to parents and other stakeholders in the community. EQAO posts board and school results on its Web site for access by the general public.

Test Design and Development

In 1999, the Ministry of Education established that successful completion of the OSSLT would become one of the 32 requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). The OSSLT is designed to assess the reading and writing skills that students are expected to have learned across all subjects by the end of Grade 9, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*. EQAO is responsible for developing and administering the OSSLT. In October 2000, a province-wide trial administration was undertaken. This assessment provided schools with an opportunity to experience first-hand what the test would be like. (The test was not a graduation requirement for this first group of students.) It also provided EQAO with an opportunity to try out administrative, marking and reporting procedures (refer to Appendix B for the results of the trial administration). The first full administration of the OSSLT was completed in February 2002. This report describes the achievement results for the first group of students for whom successful completion of the OSSLT is a diploma requirement.

Parallel versions of the OSSLT are developed for English- and French-language schools. Although the tests contain different questions, steps are taken to support comparability between the English- and French-language versions. For example, both tests have the same number and kinds of reading selections, writing tasks and questions related to the reading selections. In addition, the French and English markers are trained in the same way, using identical scoring standards and procedures. (Refer to Appendix A for a description of marking and reliability procedures.)

All aspects of the assessment, such as designing, developing, field-testing, marking and reporting, are conducted by EQAO's Education Officers in collaboration with educators from across the province.

The test consists of two integrated components:

- A reading component
- A writing component

In the reading component, students were asked to read a total of 12 short selections, divided into three different text types:

- Information (e.g., explanation, opinion)
- Graphic (e.g., graph, schedule, instructions)
- Narrative (e.g., story, dialogue)

There were three types of questions in the reading component:

- Multiple-choice (40 questions)
- Short-answer (35 questions)
- Questions requiring an explanation (25 questions)

In the writing component, students were asked to complete four writing tasks:

- A summary
- A series of paragraphs expressing an opinion

- A news report
- An information paragraph

Setting the Standard

Standards or expectations for student achievement are expressions of acceptable or desirable levels of student performance. In some large-scale assessment programs, standards are expressed as minimum achievement scores; in others, standards are descriptions of the student performance that constitutes a minimum acceptable level of achievement. The standards created for the OSSLT are of the latter type; descriptions of student work in reading and writing were developed to describe performances that meet or exceed the minimum criteria (passed) or that do not meet the criteria (did not pass). The following descriptions provide an overview of how student performance is evaluated.

General English-Language Descriptors: Writing

Passed

The student communicates in writing. He or she

- demonstrates an ability to develop, organize and connect main ideas with some supporting information.
- writes in a variety of forms, such as summary, opinion piece, news report and informational paragraph.
- generally uses appropriate words and sentence structure.
- generally does not make errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation that impede meaning.

Did Not Pass

The student has difficulty communicating in writing. He or she

- demonstrates limited skill in developing, organizing and connecting main ideas with supporting information.
- writes in a limited variety of forms and finds it difficult to complete such tasks as a summary, an opinion piece, a news report and an informational paragraph.
- uses inappropriate or incorrect words and sentence structure.
- makes errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation that impede meaning.

General English-Language Descriptors: Reading

Passed

The student reads with reasonable accuracy and proficiency. He or shedemonstrates an understanding of directly stated information.

- usually connects relevant ideas and information to understand the meaning.
- has moderate success in integrating personal knowledge and experience to extend meaning.

Did Not Pass

The student reads with limited accuracy and proficiency. He or she

- demonstrates a limited understanding of directly stated information.
- rarely connects relevant ideas and information to understand the meaning.
- has difficulty integrating personal knowledge and experience to extend meaning.

The standard was determined through a three-stage process. First, the test was field-tested, and the student papers were scored by educators, using the same procedures that would be used in scoring the actual test. Second, without knowing these scores, a standard-setting committee composed of educators, experts from three Canadian universities and members of the public (including business representatives) examined the same sample of tests and organized them into acceptable and unacceptable performances. This sorting exercise was based on training provided by EQAO and other assessment experts and involved considering the degree of literacy students would need to participate in society. The training included a review of the curriculum requirements and how they relate to the test. Finally, the scores on the tests were examined to determine the pass score that best distinguished those papers that passed from those that did not pass the test. These standards are comparable from one year to the next; therefore, the performance of all students in the future will be evaluated according to these same standards.

Test Administration

Consistent test administration procedures are important for ensuring fairness for all students. Schools were provided with training (principals and teachers from all French- and English-language schools are given identical training in how to administer the test) and resources (detailed written guides and instructions) to ensure that the same administrative procedures were followed for all students across the province. These procedures are consistent with the Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada (1993), a document created by a collection of nationally renowned educational institutions and associations and endorsed widely by education and assessment organizations.

The OSSLT was administered over two blocks of time, two-and-a-half hours each (including breaks and instructions), one on the morning of February 14 and one on the morning of February 15, 2002. Students with special needs were accommodated according to the Ministry's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127. Some English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development

(ELD) students were provided with special provisions described in EQAO's *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions.*

Further information about elements of the OSSLT, such as preparation for the test, administration issues and standard setting, are available on the EQAO Web site: www.eqao.com.

Quality Assurance

Principals were asked to pay particular attention to the handling, security and confidentiality of the assessment materials, so that the conditions for the administration of the OSSLT would be consistent across the province and to ensure that the test items remained secure until the test was given to students.

Quality Assurance monitors visited 90 English-language schools during the administration of the OSSLT. The sample schools visited included public, Catholic and private schools selected at random across the province.

In order to determine consistency in test administration, monitors were asked to examine procedures used to ensure the security of test materials before, during and after the test. Monitors reported that schools maintained tight security over the period of the test. All test materials were found to have been stored in a secure location such as the school vault or the principal's office. In all schools, individual student test materials were kept unopened in their packaging before the start of the test.

Principals reported using a wide range of approaches to create a positive attitude toward the test in their schools. Included were literacy committees, encouragement of all teachers to assume responsibility for literacy in the school, assemblies, tutors, small group meetings with students, communication with parents and a great deal of practice.

Participation

Students who participated in the February 2002 OSSLT were students who entered Grade 9 in September 2000 and were working toward an OSSD. The following table provides the number of eligible students who took part in the test, as well as the number of students by gender and student status (ESL/ELD and special needs).

Participation in the February 2002 OSSLT[2]

	Eligible Population	Percentage Absent One or Both Days	Percentage Deferred	Percentage Fully Participating
All Students	141 061	4%	4%	91%
Gender				
• Female	67 586	4%	3%	93%
• Male	71 131	4%	5%	91%
Student Status				
• ESL/ELD	3 768	2%	52%	46%
– with Special Provisions	1 583	3%	2%	95%
• Special Needs (excluding gifted)	16 646	5%	10%	85%
– IEP Only (with accommodations)	2 691	5%	1%	93%
– IEP and IPRC (with accommodations)	10 692	5%	1%	94%

Gender

The number of eligible English-language students who participated in the OSSLT was 141 061. Of these, 71 131 (50%) were males, 67 586 (48%) were females and 2344 (2%) were unspecified (gender was not reported for some students).

ESL/ELD Students

ESL students are those who arrive in Canada from another country with a first language other than English and with little or no previous experience with English. Most commonly, ELD students are those who arrive in Canada from countries where English is the first language but other varieties of English are in common use.

Of the total number of eligible students who wrote the OSSLT, the number of students enrolled either in an ESL or an ELD program was 3768 (3%). It is important to note that more than half the ESL and ELD students were deferred.

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[2] Percentages may not add up to 100%, due to rounding.

Special Provisions

Among the 3768 ESL and ELD students who were eligible for the OSSLT, 1583 (42%) received special provisions, which included changes in setting (e.g., individual study carrel, individual or small-group setting), additional time and/or periodic supervised breaks.

The following table shows the number of ESL/ELD students and the percentage of the ESL/ELD total that received each of the special provisions.

Number and Percentage of ESL/ELD Students Receiving Special Provisions

Changes in Setting	Additional Time	Periodic Supervised Breaks
1 201 (76%)	1 539 (97%)	886 (56%)

- The total number of special provisions exceeds the total number of students who received these provisions, since many students in ESL and ELD programs needed more than one type of special provision.
- Just over half of these students received all three special provisions.

Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs are those who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), who may or may not have been identified as "exceptional pupils" by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) and who are receiving special education programs and services (see Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127). Of the total number of eligible students, the number of students with special needs was 16 646 (12%). (This number does not include gifted students.)

Accommodations

Students receiving accommodations are those with an IEP, who may or may not have been identified as "exceptional pupils" by an IPRC. The EQAO *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions* describes various types of accommodations that are grouped under the following four broad categories:

1. Setting of the Test (e.g., an individual or small-group setting in a separate location or familiar space, an individual study carrel, special lighting or adaptive equipment and technology resources such as a Kurzweil reader)
2. Timing (e.g., additional time for the test beyond the time assigned or periodic supervised breaks)
3. Presentation Format (e.g., signed language, an oral interpreter or Braille, large-print or audiotaped versions of the test)
4. Response Format (e.g., audiotaped responses to the test, verbatim scribing of responses or use of computer or word processor for responses)

A total of 13 383 (9%) students were provided with various types of accommodations to enable them to participate in the OSSLT. This number includes students who were identified by an IPRC as well as students who have an IEP.

The following table shows the number and the percentage of accommodated students who received each of the types of accommodation.

Number and Percentage of Accommodated Students Receiving Each Type of Accommodation

Changes in Setting	Additional Time	Different Presentation Format	Different Response Format	Other Accommodation
11 469 (86%)	12 873 (96%)	3 404 (25%)	2 722 (20%)	95 (1%)

- Students with special needs often require two or more types of accommodation. For example, students who are blind may require Braille or large print and may also require extra time, scribing, breaks and/or a separate location. For this reason, the total number of accommodations provided exceeds the total number of students who were accommodated.
- Most accommodated students were provided with two accommodations.
- The most common accommodations provided were changes in the test setting and extra time.

Achievement Results

The following table provides a summary of provincial achievement results from the February 2002 OSSLT. The table includes all students who were eligible to write the OSSLT during the 2001–2002 school year. The number of students who were exempted from participation because they were not working toward an OSSD appears in the table. Exempted students are not included in the count of eligible students nor are they reflected in the calculation of any percentages in this or any subsequent tables.

Students can be deferred under several circumstances, as outlined in EQAO's *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions.* A student is categorized as deferred only if the Student Information Form indicates a deferral and there is no work in any of the student's test booklets. If a student completes any portion of the OSSLT, he or she is not categorized as deferred.

The following tables present achievement information, including results by gender, for ESL/ELD and Special Education students, as well as for students in applied and academic programs, from the first full administration of the OSSLT in February 2002. Clearly, some students need extra support in order to meet the provincial literacy standard. The information shown here will help to focus educators and other stakeholders on the areas in which students need to improve.

Summary of Results

	Number	Percentage[3]	
		Method 1[4]	Method 2[5]
Successfully Completed the OSSLT – Passed both reading and writing	97 227	69%	75%
Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful			
– Passed Reading Only	6 747	5%	5%
– Passed Writing Only	12 209	9%	9%
– Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	12 849	9%	10%
Total Fully Participating in the OSSLT (present on both testing days)	129 032	91%	100%
Absent One or Both Days	5 889	4%	
Deferred	6 140	4%	
Total Eligible Students	141 061	100%	
Exempt	1 147		

[3] Percentages may not add up to 100%, due to rounding.

[4] Method 1 provides a percentage breakdown of all students in the cohort who are working toward an OSSD. The only students excluded from the percentages in Method 1 are those who were not working toward an OSSD and who were therefore exempted.

[5] Method 2 provides a percentage breakdown of those students who fully participated in the OSSLT. Students are considered to have fully participated if they were present on both days of the administration.

Results by Student Characteristic

The percentages provided for various student characteristics below are based on Method 2 (all students who fully participated in the OSSLT).

Results by Gender[6]

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Passed Reading Only	Passed Writing Only	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
All Students # = 129 032	75%	5%	9%	10%
Females # = 62 931	80%	4%	9%	7%
Males # = 64 744	70%	7%	10%	13%

Observations:

- A larger percentage of female (80%) than male students (70%) successfully completed the OSSLT.
- A larger percentage of males (13%) than females (7%) did not pass reading or writing.

Results by ESL/ELD

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Passed Reading Only	Passed Writing Only	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
ESL/ELD # = 1 735	37%	3%	26%	34%

Observations:

- 63% of ESL/ELD students who wrote the test passed the writing component.
- 40% of ESL/ELD students who wrote the test passed the reading component.
- Of those ESL/ELD students who passed only one component, a larger percentage passed the writing component than passed the reading component.
- As previously noted, the number of ESL/ELD students eligible to write the test was 3768, of whom 1944 were deferred.

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[6] Results by gender are based upon the number of students for whom gender data were available. The number of students for whom gender was not specified was 1357.

Results for ESL/ELD Students Receiving Special Provisions

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Passed Reading Only	Passed Writing Only	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
ESL/ELD Receiving Special Provisions # = 1 512	43%	3%	27%	26%

Observations:

- 70% of ESL/ELD students receiving special provisions passed the writing component.
- 46% of ESL/ELD students receiving special provisions passed the reading component.
- Of those ESL/ELD students receiving special provisions who passed only one component, a larger percentage passed the writing component than passed the reading component.

Results for Students with Special Needs

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Passed Reading Only	Passed Writing Only	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
Special Needs (excludes gifted) # = 14 150	40%	6%	23%	31%

Observations:

- 63% of students with special needs who wrote the test passed the writing component.
- 46% of students with special needs who wrote the test passed the reading component.
- Of those special needs students who passed only one component, a larger percentage passed the writing component than passed the reading component.

Results for Students Receiving Accommodations

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Passed Reading Only	Passed Writing Only	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
Receiving Accommodations, IEP Only # = 2 517	43%	6%	25%	25%
Receiving Accommodations, IEP and IPRC # = 10 027	37%	6%	24%	33%

Observations:

- 68% of IEP students receiving accommodations passed the writing component.
- 49% of IEP students receiving accommodations passed the reading component.
- 61% of IEP and IPRC students receiving accommodations passed the writing component.
- 43% of IEP and IPRC students receiving accommodations passed the reading component.
- A larger percentage of IEP and IPRC students receiving accommodations passed the writing component than passed the reading component.

Results for Students by Program of Study

The results in the following table reflect the achievement of students for whom schools provided information about their program of study. As a result, the total number of students reported may not equal the total number of students who wrote the OSSLT.

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Passed Reading Only	Passed Writing Only	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
Academic Program[7] # = 66 577	87%	4%	5%	3%
Applied Program[8] # = 21 581	44%	9%	22%	25%
Locally Developed Program[9] # = 2 237	12%	5%	22%	61%

Observations:

- A large majority of students (87%) in the academic program successfully completed the OSSLT.
- Of those students in the applied program who wrote the test, 66% passed the writing component and 53% passed the reading component.
- Of those students in a locally developed program who wrote the test, 34% passed the writing component and 17% passed the reading component.
- Of students from academic, applied and locally developed programs who wrote the test, a larger percentage passed the writing component than passed the reading component.

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[7] "Academic program" refers to students enrolled in the academic level in Mathematics and/or English.

[8] "Applied program" refers to students enrolled in the applied level in **both** Mathematics and English.

[9] "Locally developed program" refers to students enrolled in Mathematics **and/or** English courses developed by a school or school board to meet local needs according to Ministry of Education policy and approval procedures for locally developed courses.

Summary of Reading Results by Type of Reading Selection, Reading Skill and Reading Strategy[10]

This table summarizes reading scores by reading selection type, reading skill and reading strategy to assist boards in focusing their remedial efforts.

	Province	
	Mean Score on the Reading Component for Students Who Passed Reading (# = 103 391)	**Mean Score on the Reading Component for Students Who Did Not Pass Reading** (# = 24 022)
Reading Selection Types:		
– Information (e.g., explanation, opinion)	69/90 (77%)	42/90 (47%)
– Graphic (e.g., graph, schedule, instructions)	39/50 (78%)	25/50 (50%)
– Narrative (e.g., story, dialogue)	50/60 (83%)	35/60 (58%)
Reading Skills:		
– Understands directly stated ideas and information	50/60 (83%)	34/60 (57%)
– Understands indirectly stated ideas and information	71/90 (79%)	45/90 (50%)
– Makes connections between personal experiences and the ideas and information in the reading selections	37/50 (74%)	23/50 (46%)
Reading Strategies:		
– Vocabulary	23/30 (77%)	16/30 (53%)
– Syntax	21/30 (70%)	11/30 (37%)
– Organization	28/36 (78%)	17/36 (47%)
– Graphic features	18/24 (75%)	11/24 (46%)

[10] Data in this table reflect the number of students who did not use large-print or audiotaped versions of the OSSLT.

The Individual Student Report provides results for each reading skill across the reading selection types for individual remedial purposes. Due to small sample sizes in many schools, summarized reading scores cannot be reliably reported by selection type, reading skill and reading strategy at the school level.

Observations:

- This table indicates that for both successful and unsuccessful students, the areas of relative strength are the "Narrative (e.g., story, dialogue)" as a type of reading selection, "Understands directly stated ideas and information" as a reading skill and "Vocabulary" as a reading strategy.

- Areas most in need of improvement for both successful and unsuccessful students are "Information (e.g., explanation, opinion)" as a type of reading selection, "Makes connections between personal experiences and the ideas and information in the reading selections" as a reading skill and "Syntax" as a reading strategy.

Summary of Writing Results by Writing Task

The following tables include data on all students who wrote the writing component of the OSSLT. The tables describe performance in terms of points, as it is described on the Individual Student Report. Please note that the Annotated Student Responses OSSLT, February 2002 describe the same performance in terms of "columns," referring to the scoring rubric.

Summary

	Province
	Percentage of Students by Performance on Writing Task (# = 129 032)
Blank/Illegible (0 Points)	13%
Irrelevant Content/Off-Task (0 Points)	5%
1 Point	2%
2 Points	27%
3 Points	36%
4 Points	17%

Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion

	Province
	Percentage of Students by Performance on Writing Task (# = 129 032)
Blank/Illegible (0 Points)	2%
Irrelevant Content/Off-Task (0 Points)	5%
1 Point	<1%
2 Points	18%
3 Points	50%
4 Points	24%

News Report

	Province
	Percentage of Students by Performance on Writing Task (# = 129 032)
Blank/Illegible (0 Points)	4%
Irrelevant Content/Off-Task (0 Points)	3%
1 Point	<1%
2 Points	13%
3 Points	54%
4 Points	26%

Information Paragraph

	Province
	Percentage of Students by Performance on Writing Task (# = 129 032)
Blank/Illegible (0 Points)	5%
Irrelevant Content/Off-Task (0 Points)	7%
1 Point	<1%
2 Points	15%
3 Points	50%
4 Points	23%

Observations:

- On three of the writing tasks ("Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion," "News report" and "Information Paragraph"), a high percentage (between 73% and 80%) of students scored three points or more.
- The writing task in most need of improvement is the "Summary" task.

Results from the Student Questionnaire

Each student who wrote the OSSLT was asked to complete a questionnaire about his or her background, interests and reading and writing activities. The following tables summarize the information gathered.

Response Rates

Province		
Eligible Students	**Completed Questionnaires**	**Response Rate**
141 061	128 682	91%

- 91% of the students completed the Student Questionnaire; this represents a very high response rate.

Student Computer Use, Language and Background[11]

Percentage of students indicating that	Province	
	Females (# = 62 779)	Males (# = 64 557)
– they have a computer in their home.	92%	91%
– English is the first language that they learned at home.	77%	76%
– English is the language spoken most frequently at home.	77%	76%
– they were born outside Canada.	18%	18%

Observations:

- There were no significant differences between male students and female students in the above contextual information.
- A high percentage of both males and females reported that they have access to a computer in their home.

[11] Note: Percentages in the following tables are based on the total number of students who completed a questionnaire and for whom gender data were available.

Reading and Writing Outside School

Percentage of students indicating that	Province	
	Females (# = 62 779)	Males (# = 64 557)
– they read English outside school for three or more hours a week (not counting homework).	39%	31%
– they read the following kinds of material outside school most weeks:		
• biographies or other non-fiction books	21%	18%
• comics	26%	33%
• Internet material	75%	69%
• letters	46%	17%
• magazines	82%	64%
• manuals, instructions	10%	23%
• newspapers	44%	48%
• novels, fiction, short stories	63%	41%
• poetry, song lyrics	45%	20%
• religious or spiritual readings	14%	10%
– they write in English outside school for three or more hours a week (not counting homework).	33%	25%
– they do the following types of writing outside school most weeks:		
• e-mail messages, chat-room conversations	87%	82%
• letters, journals, diaries	66%	15%
• notes, directions, instructions	45%	30%
• song lyrics, poems	32%	19%
• stories, fiction	15%	11%

Observations:

- A higher percentage of female students than male students said they read and write outside school for three or more hours a week.
- The majority of students said that they do not read outside school for more than three hours a week (61% of females and 69% of males). This was also true of writing: the majority of students responded that they do not write for more than three hours a week (67% of females and 75% of males).
- The majority of females indicated that they read magazines; Internet material; and novels, fiction or short stories outside school most weeks. The majority of males indicated they read Internet material and magazines.

- The majority of females responded that they write e-mail or chat-room messages and letters, journals or diaries; the majority of males said they write e-mail or chat-room messages.
- A slightly higher number of male students than female students indicated they read comics and newspapers; more males than females said they read manuals and instructions.
- A higher percentage of female students than male students read letters; poetry or song lyrics; and novels, fiction or short stories.
- Many more female students than male students reported that they write letters, journals or diaries, notes, directions or instructions, and song lyrics or poems.

Relationships Among the Data

EQAO released its first Education Quality Indicators Program (EQUIP) report in December 2001. This was followed by a summary report of 2001 EQUIP survey data in March 2002. Together these reports provide information about education quality issues and the learning environment. In all, 13 educational indicators are reported at the secondary level and are taken from a variety of different sources, including Statistics Canada, the Ministry of Education and EQAO. EQUIP data provide contextual and other information that helps parents, members of the education community and the public examine and better understand student achievement results. For more information about EQUIP, please refer to the EQAO Web site (www.eqao.com).

For this report on the OSSLT results, various statistical measures were used to examine the relationships among the data; however, the findings were highly consistent regardless of the statistical method used. (Refer to the OSSLT technical paper on the EQAO Web site for a complete list and description of these measures, as well as a description of the statistical analyses that were performed and the relationships that were discovered among the measures.)

The main findings of these analyses were that

- all five measures of achievement (percentage of students passing both reading and writing, percentage of students passing reading only, percentage of students passing writing only, average writing score, average reading score) were strongly related to each other.
- many EQUIP indicator variables (e.g., school enrolment, home neighbourhood measures and school survey results) were significantly related to achievement.

The strongest positive relationships with achievement were

- access to a home computer
- average household income
- average household educational attainment
- total school enrolment
- average stakeholder rating on school safety: Stakeholders (e.g., parents, school council members, teachers, school administrators and support staff) were asked to respond on a scale of one (lowest) to five (highest) to statements such as "There is very little physical fighting at school," "There is very

little cutting of classes or skipping of school," "There is very little stealing at school," "There is very little verbal abuse at school" and "There is very little harassment at school."

- average student rating on school safety: Students were asked to respond on a scale of one (lowest) to five (highest) to questions and statements such as "How often do you feel safe while in your school," "There is very little physical fighting at school," "There is very little discrimination at school" and "There is very little harassment at school."

- average respondent rating on a few leadership measures: Stakeholders (e.g., parents on school councils, teachers, school administrators and support staff) were asked to respond on a scale of one (lowest) to five (highest) to statements such as "High expectations for staff are part of the school's climate," "Classroom practices reflect the school's mission" and "The work of the school council is actively supported within the school."

The above findings mean that the higher the measures on the above variables, the higher the achievement scores tend to be. Thus in schools where many students reported having access to a home computer, where the average household income was relatively high, where many stakeholders believed there was little physical fighting, little cutting of classes or skipping of school, where many students reported feeling safe while in school and where there was little discrimination at school, the achievement scores tended to be higher.

Specific Recommendations

Planning for Improvement

EQAO recommends

- that **school boards,** in consultation with their school communities, and using the EQAO *Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning,* incorporate the overall and specific data from the February 2002 OSSLT into their existing board and school improvement plans for developing student literacy. Boards should implement strategies for improving student achievement in reading and writing that extend across
the elementary and secondary grades and across all subject areas.

- that **schools,** in consultation with their communities, incorporate the overall and specific data from the February 2002 OSSLT into their existing school literacy improvement plans and develop curriculum-wide strategies for improving student achievement in reading and writing.

Relevance and Student Motivation

EQAO recommends

- that the **Ministry, school boards, principals and teachers,** in partnership with students, parents and school councils, take further steps to help students understand the relevance of literacy to learning in all subject areas, and the importance of literacy skills to future educational and career opportunities, and in everyday life outside school.

- that **EQAO** provide information for parents about the reading and writing skills required for successful completion of the OSSLT and encourage parents to assist students in understanding the relevance and importance of literacy skills.

- that **parents** enhance their own understanding of the reading and writing skills required for successful completion of the OSSLT and assist students in understanding the relevance and importance of literacy skills to future educational and career opportunities, and in everyday life outside school.

- that the **Ministry, school boards, principals and teachers,** recognizing the strong connection between literacy and the use of technology, develop strategies students can use in school and at home when using computers, that will enhance student achievement in reading and writing (e.g., thoughtful use of spell- and style-checkers and the use of the "Find" function to track significant words in a reading selection).

Reading

EQAO recommends

- that **principals and teachers,** in consultation with students, parents and school councils, review the Student Questionnaire data for students in their school and determine how students' home reading, especially in the area of information texts, can be used to encourage students to develop more effective reading strategies, increased reading comprehension and a greater enjoyment of reading.

- that **school boards and schools** carefully study the data on reading strategies to determine whether students in their jurisdiction are having particular difficulty with reading questions related to vocabulary, syntax, organization and/or graphic features, and have teachers in all subject areas assist students in developing an understanding of how these strategies are used to increase reading comprehension.

- that **school boards, principals and teachers,** in consultation with students, parents and school councils, examine the data on reading and writing achievement in order to identify subjects and/or courses where additional emphasis on reading and writing skills is required.

- that the **Ministry and school boards** extend the reading development strategies in Ontario's Early Reading Strategy across all grades (e.g., availability of remedial programs, reading expertise in each school and a variety of reading materials to all students).

- that **school boards** access available funding from the Ministry to develop and provide remedial literacy programs that help students improve their reading and writing skills.

Writing

EQAO recommends

- that **teachers,** in consultation with students and parents, use the Annotated Student Responses on the EQAO Web site to help students understand the characteristics of successful writing, so that they can strengthen their knowledge and skills related to the quality of writing required for success on the OSSLT.

- that **schools and school boards** pay particular attention to strategies that will motivate and assist students who are currently unsuccessful in the writing component of the OSSLT.

- that **schools and school boards** pay particular attention to strategies that will motivate and assist students in strengthening their knowledge and skills related to writing summaries.

Support for Teachers

EQAO recommends

- that the **Ontario College of Teachers** include a compulsory course on reading skill acquisition and development as a requirement of the Professional Learning Program. Boards and schools should be encouraged to offer professional development opportunities for teachers in the area of literacy instruction.

- that **teachers** be encouraged to use the Support Materials, Annotated Student Responses, Example Test Booklet and the Getting Ready Guide available on EQAO's Web site to help students prepare to write the OSSLT successfully (e.g., to understand the format of the test, the number and kinds of reading questions and writing tasks, the time constraints, the need to respond to all reading questions and writing tasks, the need to write on the topic and to follow the instructions provided for all writing tasks, and how the test is marked).

Diverse Student Populations

EQAO recommends

- that **school boards, principals and teachers** examine the teacher and student questionnaire data for applied courses and ensure that the strategies and resources being used to teach and assess these courses appropriately reflect their focus, the provincial curriculum expectations for applied courses and the needs and motivation of students in courses at this level, with emphasis on the reading and writing skills measured on the OSSLT.

- that **school boards, principals and teachers,** in consultation with students, parents and school councils review the achievement and questionnaire data for applied and academic courses and determine what additional steps need to be taken in order to increase the percentage of students reaching the provincial standard in reading and writing on the OSSLT.

- that **school boards,** in consultation with parents, students and school councils, monitor the achievement of ESL/ELD students on the OSSLT and implement a variety of strategies for assisting students in these programs to be successful on the OSSLT and ensure that these students have a maximum number of opportunities to participate in the OSSLT.

- that **school boards,** in consultation with parents, students and school councils, monitor the achievement of students in special education courses on the OSSLT and implement a variety of strategies for assisting students in these programs to be successful on the OSSLT.

School Climate

EQAO recommends

- that **school boards, principals and teachers,** in partnership with students, parents and school councils, promote feelings of safety and security in the school, recognizing that such a climate makes students better able to benefit from classroom instruction, which in turn has a positive impact on student achievement.

Appendix A — Marking and Reliability Procedures

The following quality control and reliability procedures are built into all parts of the marking process to ensure high levels of consistency in the marking of students' work:

a) ***Chain marking method:*** For both the reading and writing components, different markers mark specific booklets or parts of a student's work. For the February 2002 OSSLT, four different markers were assigned to mark one of the reading parts each, and four different markers were assigned to mark one of the four writing tasks each. This assures greater consistency in marking than using a single marker for all of a student's work or each of the components. (Refer to *The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Resource Guide, 2000–2001.)*

b) ***Training papers:*** Each day during marking, training papers are marked and discussed by all markers working on a particular writing task or set of reading questions. The training papers are carefully selected to reflect various complexities of student responses. This ensures that markers are confident in using the scoring rubrics and do so consistently throughout the marking session on all types of student responses.

c) ***Group marking papers:*** Every afternoon during marking, a common paper is marked by all markers working with a particular writing task or set of reading questions. The data from this exercise are analyzed to determine the level of consistency across the marking site as well as within the groups. Where low levels of consistency (i.e., less than 80% exact agreement) are identified, additional group and site training is provided.

d) ***Blind reinsertions:*** A number of student papers are randomly pre-selected and reinserted into the marking flow to receive a second set of marks. The scores derived from the first marking and those derived from the second marking are then correlated to derive an index of marker consistency, in a procedure similar to the one used in the Grade 10 Washington Assessment of Student Learning (Taylor, 2001). Correlation analyses for the reinsertion papers, by component and within language programs, show that the inter-rater reliability coefficients are over 0.80. For reading, the inter-rater reliability coefficient was 0.92 for English (# = 4425). For writing, the inter-rater reliability coefficient was 0.85 for English (# = 4442). "Typically, reliability coefficients for large-scale assessments...should be at least in the mid to high 0.80s." (Refer to the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) *Guide to Understanding AIMS Results.*) Thus, these results are in keeping with the standards expected concerning reliability in large-scale assessments, namely that student responses be scored consistently and the scoring rubrics be applied in a uniform manner.

e) ***Double marking:*** All student papers close to the pass score are routed back for a second (blind) marking. This procedure ensures that students' papers are appropriately scored and allows for a better determination of the accuracy of results around the pass score. All marks for students' papers near the pass score are reviewed during the marking process. (Refer to *The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Resource Guide, 2000–2001* for a more detailed description of this two-phase marking process for the reading and writing components.)

Appendix B — Provincial Results, October 2000 Trial Administration of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

Displayed below are the results from the October 2000 trial administration. The primary purpose of the trial administration was to refine procedures at all levels. The October 2000 conditions for test administration and the data analyses and reporting formats differ from those for February 2002. For these reasons, any comparison of results should be made with caution. This information does indicate some patterns of improvement between the two administrations of the OSSLT.

Participation Summary:		**Method 1**	**Method 2**
Students who wrote the test (both days)	127046	90 %	100 %
Absent one or both days*	9187	7 %	n/a
Deferred	4779	3 %	n/a
Total Students working towards a diploma	**141012**	**100 %**	n/a
Exempt	1089	n/a	n/a
Total Including Exemptions	**142101**		
Results:			
Successfully completed the test**	86248	61 %	68 %
Wrote the test, but were not successful:			
Failed both Reading and Writing	18699	13 %	15 %
Failed Writing and passed Reading	15154	11 %	12 %
Failed Reading and passed Writing	6945	5 %	5 %
			100 %
Absent one or both days*	9187	7 %	n/a
Deferred	4779	3 %	n/a
Total Students working towards a diploma	141012	100 %	n/a

Method 1 expresses the number of students as a percentage of all Grade 10 students who are working towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma including students who were deferred or absent for all or part of the test.

Method 2 expresses the number of students as a percentage of those Grade 10 students who are working towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and who wrote the test, excluding those who were deferred or absent for all or part of the test.

* All students for whom completed booklets were not received are considered absent unless the Student Information Form (SIF) indicated that they were either exempt or deferred.

** To successfully complete the test, students must have passed both the reading and writing portions of the test.

Overall Test Results for School, Board, and Province

	Did Not Write (includes deferrals)	Failed both Reading and Writing	Failed Reading, Passed Writing	Passed Reading, Failed Writing	Passed both Reading and Writing
School Results	n/a %	n/a %	n/a %	n/a %	n/a %
Board Results	n/a %	n/a %	n/a %	n/a %	n/a %
Provincial Results	10%	13%	5%	11%	61%

Test Results by Gender

	Did Not Write (includes deferrals)	Failed both Reading and Writing	Failed Reading, Passed Writing	Passed Reading, Failed Writing	Passed both Reading and Writing
Females	7%	10%	5%	8%	70%
Males	9%	17%	5%	13%	55%

Information on Deferrals, Accommodations, and Special Provisions

	Wrote with Accommodations or Special Provisions	Deferred
ESL/ELD	691	2284
IEP or IPRC and IEP	8587	1286
Other Reason, or not Specified	1510	1246
Total Students*	10749	4779
Percent of Total Eligible Students	8 %	3 %

* The "Total Students" figure may be smaller than the sum of the previous three rows because some students may be in an ESL or ELD program and also have an IPRC and/or IEP.

Gender Breakdown of Eligible (Non-exempt) Students

Female	47%
Male	50%
Not specified	3%

Program Enrollment

Students enrolled in academic level in Mathematics and/or English	69%
Students enrolled in applied level in both Mathematics and English	22%
Students enrolled in locally developed courses in Mathematics and/or English	3%
Program level not specified	6%

Contextual Information from the Student Questionnaire

Of 141012 eligible students, 125110 (89%) completed a questionnaire.

Note: Percentages in the following tables are of the total completing the questionnaire. These data may represent a somewhat biased view of the overall population of eligible students because, in most cases, absent or deferred students did not complete the questionnaire.

Percent of students indicating that:	Females	Males
·they have a computer in their home	91%	91%
·English is the first language that they learned in the home	79%	79%
·English is the language spoken most frequently in the home	79%	78%
·they were born outside Canada	17%	18%

Reading and Writing Outside School

Percent of students indicating that:	Females	Males
·they read in English outside of school for three or more hours a week (not counting homework)	36%	28%
·they read the following kinds of material outside school most weeks:		
- Biographies and other non-fiction books	20%	15%
- Comics	28%	36%
- Internet material	72%	67%
- Letters	57%	21%
- Magazines	66%	70%
- Manuals, instructions	9%	20%
- Newspapers	40%	47%
- Novels, fiction, short stories	62%	39%
- Poetry, song lyrics	46%	20%
- Religious or spiritual readings	13%	9%
·they write in English outside of school for three or more hours a week (not counting homework)	30%	21%
·they do the following types of writing outside of school most weeks:		
- E-mail messages, chat- room conversations	79%	78%
- Letters, journals, diaries	76%	22%
- Notes, directions, instructions	41%	31%
- Song lyrics, poems	34%	18%
- Stories, fiction	18%	13%